



CODENEXT: LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE DIAGNOSIS HOUSINGWORKS PERSPECTIVE

The Code Diagnosis provides a comprehensive analysis of the City of Austin's existing Land Development Code and details how certain aspects of the existing LDC are in conflict with Imagine Austin's vision. One of the top 10 findings is the lack of household affordability and choice. This particular finding substantiates what housing advocates, practitioners, and community members have witnessed on the ground – a growing need for deeply affordable housing and an increasing loss of families with children as they search for seemingly more affordable housing options outside of the city limits.

In order to have a comprehensive strategy to increase affordable housing opportunities, the following policy considerations are critical:

Equitable Housing Through Inclusion

HousingWorks recognizes that well-located density, streamlined development reviews, and a simple and predictable development process will increase affordability in a broad sense. But in order to achieve true affordability, it is imperative that onsite, inclusionary affordable housing policies are implemented across the city and in a range of housing types. The city's current Vertical Mixed Use program is beginning to show results (with more than 300 rental units affordable to 60% - 80% MFI). If this type of program (development incentives such as increased density and relaxed development standards in exchange for onsite affordability) were implemented in targeted areas across the city, particularly in strategic locations such as TODs and core transit corridors, this would be a significant gain for affordability.

Efficient Use of Publicly-Owned Land to Serve Critical Community Needs

HousingWorks also recommends the strategic acquisition, disposition, and development of publicly owned land. Publicly-owned land provides an opportunity for achieving deeper affordability. A myriad of stakeholder groups (and a recent City Council Resolution) have called for the identification and comprehensive inventory of publicly-owned land that is feasible for residential use. Publicly-owned land should have residential development as a right. Any publicly-owned land that is developed with any residential component should have explicit on-site

affordability requirements attached. Mueller Redevelopment provides a replicable example, with 25% affordability.

Recognizing that Household Affordability is Multifaceted

Household affordability is more than simply housing expenses; it must also consider utilities and transportation costs. Increased affordability can be achieved if new housing is developed with reduced water use and increased energy efficiency in mind. In addition, household living expenses can be reduced via lower transportation costs if housing is in mixed-use areas where retail, schools, and/or work destinations can be reached on foot, by bike, via public transportation, or with a short drive.

Increasing Diversity of Housing Types

The Code Diagnosis identifies “missing middle” housing as a critical community need. Census data shows that the urban core is losing families with children. Much of Austin’s dense infill development is not responsive to the needs of families with children. HousingWorks recommends that CodeNEXT encourage design and development that responds to the needs of families with children. In addition, as mentioned previously, any inclusionary policies should encourage a diverse range of housing types, including housing types that are attractive to families with children.

The LDC consultants’ consistent message has been that the LDC Rewrite will not by itself solve the city’s affordable housing crisis. Recognizing this, it is imperative that the expanded list of recommendations (page 55 of the Land Development Code Diagnosis) remains alongside the technical recommendations. These are related policy recommendations that must be considered and implemented alongside the core Land Development Code changes. If we only focus on the technical recommendations, we lose sight of the opportunity to achieve more substantial and far-reaching affordability throughout our city.

The City of Austin has three core values related to affordable housing: long-term affordability, deeper affordability, and geographic dispersion. The Land Development Code Rewrite, and its accompanying policy recommendations, presents a unique opportunity to increase affordability across the City of Austin, in line with the Imagine Austin vision and the City of Austin core values.